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Clergy see news media with more influence than religion By Carol Woodfin

Baptist Press
4/28/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A majority of ministers and priests believe "the news media have a greater influence on the way people think and act than religion does." According to a recent study conducted by Vanderbilt University's Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, nearly 80 percent of clergy responding agreed with this statement.

Some 100 religion writers and a sampling of newspaper editors, however, disagreed on the influence of the news media by a margin of 5-to-3.

John Dart, Los Angeles Times religion editor and visiting scholar at the center, presented a preliminary report on a survey on religion and the news media to the annual meeting of the Historical Commission and Southern Baptist Historical Society in Nashville April 27.

Dart co-authored the study with Jimmy Allen, former Southern Baptist Convention and Radio and Television Commission president. The survey included more than 500 clergy from different denominations, including many Southern Baptists. The Freedom Forum will release the complete findings of the study later this year.

Of the respondents, 26 percent said they were Catholic, 43 percent "mainline Protestant," 26 percent "evangelical Christian," 5 percent "fundamentalist Christian" and a few answered "other religion." Combining the "evangelical Christians" and the "fundamentalist Christians," a total of 31 percent of the respondents could be considered "conservative Protestant clergy," Dart said.

"Conservative clergy tended to be the most pessimistic about the influence of religion in personal lives and in public affairs, the great majority of evangelicals and fundamentalists saying that religion was losing influence," Dart reported.

The "conservative clergy" also believed overwhelmingly that news reporting was biased against ministers and organized religion. Journalists disagreed by considerable margins, Dart noted.

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Dart countered the notion that this discrepancy results from differences in outlook of the conservative clergy versus the liberal news media. Instead, Dart claimed, "a secular press is reporting on religion in the context of a secularized society."

"The blame cannot be placed on what some have called an irreligious, non-believing press," Dart said. "Religion writers ... in fact tend to be more religious than the general public." Dart cited a recent national survey by two Indiana University journalism professors showing "one-third of the journalists at print, broadcasting and magazine outlets said that religion was 'very important' to them and another third said that it was 'somewhat' important."

"Religion news does have a problem in competing with other news, and it has to do with faith's current confusion in society at large," Dart stated. "Religion has become privatized today ... not usually talked about in day-to-day conversation and business That problem is compounded by the recognized liberal-conservative divisions that exist in most denominations." Dart concluded: "Few church bodies can truly speak with a unified voice, and even then represent only a small proportion of people in an increasingly religiously pluralistic society."

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Linkletter tells seniors to exercise,
volunteer to ward off depression By Jim Burton

Baptist Press
4/28/93

ATLANTA (BP)--This year Art Linkletter celebrates the 30th anniversary of his 50th birthday.

"I'm a young man," said the pioneer of radio and television talk shows. Linkletter was a featured speaker at the 1993 Southern Baptist Senior Adult Convention in Atlanta at the Georgia Dome, April 26-28.

For Americans who remember his long-running TV shows "People Are Funny" and "House Party," Linkletter is an American institution. A humble beginning magnifies the accomplishments.

Born in Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, Canada, Linkletter was an orphan. A traveling Baptist lay preacher, Fulton Linkletter, and his wife learned of the abandoned child while preaching in Canada. They later adopted him.

Much like the father of foreign missions, William Carey, Linkletter's adopted father was a shoe cobbler. The trade supported his preaching ministry.

"He examined soles and souls," Linkletter recalled of his father who was always doing evangelistic work.

Linkletter often went with his father on "evangelistic forays" and vividly recalls playing the triangle during street corner services.

As his career unfolded in radio and TV, Linkletter became "less attentive to his beliefs." But a personal tragedy brought him back to the roots of his faith. His daughter, Diane, died of a drug overdose 25 years ago.

Linkletter is quick to share the lessons he learned then.

"Don't blame yourself," Linkletter advises parents whose children suffer tragedy. "You cannot protect your child from the potholes of life, though you should try to prepare them (for life's hardships).

"One thing losing a child does is make you much more loving of others," he said. "Don't delay telling others you love them."

Recall the good times, Linkletter tells grieving parents. "You wouldn't give up the good times just to avoid the grief, would you?"

The lessons of life Linkletter shares reinforces what he believes was his calling: speaking, teaching and preaching.

"Show business was a detour that took up most of my life," he mused.

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Following Diane's death, Linkletter became a spokesman against drug abuse. His work in drug abuse prevention and education led him to understand that a major cause of drug abuse was poor self-esteem. This led to motivational speaking that affirms the worth of individuals. More recently, he has become an advocate and spokesman for senior adults, calling himself a messenger for positive aging.

"Every day 5,000 people turn 65," Linkletter said. "The fastest-growing segment of the population is over 100. By 2050, there will be 1 million Americans over 100 years old."

The concern for senior adults ties back to his drug abuse campaigns. A growing number of senior adults are fighting depression -- a common problem in the age group -- with alcohol, Linkletter said.

Volunteerism is a major defense against depression, followed by what Linkletter calls a free prescription to cure most common ailments -- aerobic exercise. Coupled with faith, an active lifestyle committed to serving others will ward off depression while building one's sense of worth.

"The young older person (65-75) must give serious thought to how they are going to make life interesting," Linkletter said. "You have to think about growing older. Make plans and have something to get up for."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers from Atlanta.

From nostalgic to new,
music moves seniors

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
4/28/93

ATLANTA (BP)--From "I'll Fly Away" to some of the newest hymns in "The Baptist Hymnal," lyrics and music moved senior adults to become a part of the worship experience during the Southern Baptist Senior Adult Convention, April 26-28.

The singing, foot tapping, hand clapping and humming were not solicited responses to a printed order of service. They were spontaneous testimony to the importance of a singing faith from a generation that grew up on the live music of parents and grandparents rather than videos and CDs.

The joined voices of 20,000 retired persons, mostly in their 60s and 70s, sang a range of music from "oldies" such as "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart" and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder" to contemporary choruses, including "Glorify Thy Name" and "People Need the Lord."

A 4,000-plus-voice senior adult choir, requiring 10 directors scattered throughout several sections of the Georgia Dome, presented music written specifically for the vocal range of older singers.

While the reception of older musicians by their peer group was enthusiastic, equally well received were the music and accompanying videos of concert artists Steve Green and Cynthia Clawson.

Green presented updated arrangements of many traditional songs and got the undivided, silent attention of the audience with an a capella rendition of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Clawson, who is known among Southern Baptists as a hymn singer, presented music from her latest work, "Blessed Assurance -- Songs My Grandmother Taught Me." Joining her on stage was Clawson's grandmother, Willie Patrick of Conroe, Texas. Patrick appeared unimpressed with her own stage debut, but sat engrossed while her granddaughter sang, "It Is Well with My Soul." The audience got a good view of Patrick on Diamond-screen above the stage as she occasionally formed the words along with Clawson as though coaching her.

The Genevox Music Group premiere of "Don't Hang Up!" was presented by the Georgia Baptist senior adult choir, directed by Bob Woolley, retired church music director for the Missouri Baptist Convention. Drama for the work by Everett Robertson and Stan Pethel was presented by the senior adult choir of Weiuca Road Baptist church of Atlanta.

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A surprise music addition to the convention was the appearance of a men's quartet, called "Friends," that included gospel singer Terry Blackwood.

Other musical features included the sanctuary orchestra of First Baptist Church of Atlanta; the choir of The Christian Fellowship Baptist Church of College Park, Ga.; Joe Parks, pianist and composer from Chattanooga, Tenn.; Monte Maxwell, organist and music teacher from New York City; the Sons of Jubal, the Jubalheirs and the Jubal Brass, groups composed of musicians from across Georgia; the Atlanta Celebration Orchestra; and the Morehouse College glee club of Atlanta.

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(BP) photo of Clawson and her grandmother mailed to state Baptist newspapers from Atlanta on Wednesday.

Contemporary Christian music
building strong following

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press
4/28/93

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Why is Michael English telling the crowd he's nervous? There he stands, center stage, an up-and-coming solo artist with top billing at the fabulous Fox Theatre in St. Louis. On this night, more than 2,000 contemporary Christian music fans have gathered to hear him and two other acts: the group 4HIM and the duo Angelo and Veronica.

The Gospel Music Association's top male vocalist for two years running, English has the audience in the palm of his hand. As if a voice that soars like the Concorde and drives like a freedom train weren't gift enough, English has looks, as they say, to die for.

But he sings for the one who died for him.

He tells the crowd how his faith in Jesus Christ helped him overcome panic disorder and how he believes God will heal his overused vocal cords. He thanks his fans for their prayers.

After the concert, Harvester Baptist Church youth minister Mitch Marlowe is chauffeuring 15 youth back to St. Charles, Mo. Marlowe wants to listen to a basketball game on the radio, and his riders are rebelling. "They want to continue the pumped-up feeling" by listening to the music of the performers they just saw. The majority rules.

Marlowe doesn't mind -- he's a fan of the music himself. He takes his youth group to Christian concerts "whenever we get a chance and whenever we can afford it."

"It gives them an opportunity to worship, most of all," he said. "It gives them an opportunity to put a name with a face, and in doing that to realize these people are real and they have struggles in their everyday life just like the kids do."

Contemporary Christian music -- or "CCM" -- has exploded in popularity over the past decade. It now represents the third-largest-selling form of recorded music, behind rock and country and ahead of classical and jazz. Its 5 percent share of the market makes it a \$480 million a year industry in recording sales alone.

CCM is available in styles from pop-folk to country to hard-rock to rap. Some radio stations play nothing else.

The artists produce music videos as well as compact discs and cassette tapes. Youth ministers employ the music during weekly group meetings and retreats. They lead Bible studies based on the videos.

"Music is a big thing with teen-agers," Marlowe points out, "and it really needs to be an avenue for reaching them." Harvester Baptist Church has brought in artists such as Al Denson and Michael Card for concerts in the church auditorium.

Kirk Sullivan of 4HIM has performed Christian music for 15 years. Backstage prior to the show at the Fox, he recalls when artists recorded in second-hand studios. "Production is second to none, now."

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He also notes a greater emphasis on ministry. From the stage, 4HIM promotes the American Bible Society's efforts to send Bibles to the former Yugoslavia. They also issue an invitation to accept Christ as Savior or to recommit to him.

Another change Sullivan points to is the quality of material. "I believe the Holy Spirit has allowed people to write songs more powerful than have ever been before."

In "Back to the Basics," title song of 4HIM's newest CD, the lyrics deal with the disturbing fact that lifestyles formerly considered wrong have become acceptable. "Nowadays anything that's pure and holy is made fun of," Sullivan says.

When he was with the group Truth, Sullivan took part in more than 300 concerts a year. He considers 4HIM's 140-date schedule fairly easy by comparison, but the quartet works hard.

"The Psalm says to play and play skillfully," he says. "If you've rehearsed it and you do the best you can, you've done a good job. We don't sing perfect every night, but we try."

John Wehrle, a 17-year-old high school junior and a member of Marlowe's youth group, describes himself as a "totally big fan" of contemporary Christian music. He hasn't always been that way.

"Before I thought Christian music was like choirs and dopey music," he says. "I thought it was really corny." Now he thinks CCM is "two times better" than secular music.

"I would say that the words just capture your heart," he says. "They just inspire me more and more to live by my Christian walk and standards that the world doesn't want me to have."

He adds that the music is an "awesome witness" to secular friends at his 2,400-student public high school in St. Charles.

"We played (Christian rap group) DC Talk after school and all these kids started coming up and dancing and stuff."

Wehrle's school has a number of Christian "metal-heads" who use Christian heavy-metal music by bands such as Tourniquet to witness to friends who are into secular heavy-metal, which is heavy on satanism, violence and destruction.

Ron Moore, a member of the Missouri Baptist Convention Bible study team, says a concert some years ago by the Grammy Award-winning Christian rock group Petra turned him from a skeptic to a believer in CCM.

"I heard Jesus Christ proclaimed in music and from the stage," he recalls. The band gave an invitation and young people went forward to accept Christ. "I walked away from there with a totally different viewpoint."

Moore has written Bible studies for interl'inc, a Tennessee company that distributes CCM-based Bible study material to youth ministers. Petra now includes Bible study outlines with its videos, which are sold at Christian bookstores and other outlets.

"I've found it to be very sound," Moore says of the interl'inc and Petra materials. The Bible studies are general in nature and non-doctrinal.

Moore acknowledges some people have a hard time getting it out of their minds that rock music is inherently evil. He advises people to look at the lyrics, the lifestyle of the artist and the cover of the CD or tape to determine whether it is appropriate.

At one point in history, Moore notes, well-meaning people went around destroying organs in churches because organs were associated with saloons. "Now our organs are our sacred things of the church."

"God's capable of using loud rock music as well as a nice, quiet hymn," Moore concludes. "Why should we limit God?"

Integration of contemporary music into worship services can run into a wall of tradition. Lamar Fitzgerald, choir director at Old Community Baptist Church in Webster Groves, says members experienced the fear of the unknown when he first tried to steer them in a new direction.

"They didn't think it would go over well -- and at first it didn't," he admits. "Very slowly they're starting to like it."

His advice to choir leaders contemplating a similar move: "Take it slow and start with things that are completely scriptural. I would start with something closest to the music my congregation was used to and go from there."

In a 1991 report titled "Today's Teens: A Generation in Transition," the Barna Research Group recommended that churches introduce teens to contemporary Christian music. Barna acknowledges conservative churches might have a hard time with the suggestion.

"The point, however, is that today's teens will hear rock and other types of contemporary music regardless of where they hear it first -- at church, on the radio, via MTV, etc.," he says. "If there is an opportunity to provide them with a sound that they relate to, which embodies lyrics that lift up the name and ministry of Jesus Christ, this is certainly to the advantage of all involved."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Word & Way, Missouri Baptist newsjournal.

Former Duke football star chases
converts instead of quarterbacks By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
4/28/93

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--It is the dream of many American boys to one day play in the NFL, but few ever come close to realizing that dream. For Anthony Allen, it was merely a phone call away, but he chose to bench his dream for the sake of the gospel.

Allen, who graduates this semester from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, was looking forward to a career in the National Football League after graduating from Duke University in 1990, where he played in every varsity game his freshman year and was a starting defensive tackle by the time he was a sophomore.

"The all-consuming desire of my life was to play football," Allen said.

Coaches and sportswriters began describing Allen as a potential All-American and a future professional football player. Yet Allen was unhappy. He sensed God was calling him to do more than focus on football. He began preaching at a rescue mission in Durham and that fanned into flame another gift God had given him: preaching.

"I realized that's what God wanted me to do, but I resisted for a while," Allen said. "I could not imagine myself as a pastor."

God's calling proved stronger than the 6-foot, 5-inch, 285-pound tackle. On a night that rolled "a hundred pounds of burden" off his life, Allen committed himself to vocational Christian ministry.

"It wasn't that I didn't like football, it was that I had found something better," Allen said. "I remember a time when all I wanted to do was chase quarterbacks, then I started preaching and I found a thrill even greater than that."

Allen continued to play football for Duke and live according to his Christian beliefs. He served three years as the president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at Duke and started a Bible study with his Christian roommate.

"Whether it was in football or in school, I applied the biblical principle, 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it as unto the Lord,'" Allen said. "One of my coaches told me he appreciated that I came to practice every day ready to work."

In one of Duke's best seasons, the Blue Devils won the Atlantic Coast Conference championship Allen's senior year. At the time, Duke's head coach was Steve Spurrier, now coach of the Florida Gators. Spurrier said Allen was an outstanding player, instrumental in Duke winning the ACC Championship and also one of his favorite players to call upon for blessing the team's meals the night before each game.

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According to Allen, Spurrier said, "Anthony, every time you pray, we win the football game!" Allen pointed out the plan worked right up until the All-American Bowl, which Duke lost to Texas Tech.

At the close of Allen's senior year, it was projected he would be drafted by the NFL during the 10th round or below. Allen said his attitude about a career in the NFL had completely changed since committing his life to Christian ministry. Before his commitment to ministry, Allen was hoping God would let him play in the NFL. After the commitment, he was willing to play, but only if God told him that was what he was supposed to do. Allen said his heart was not in playing professional football, but God was in the process of giving him the desire of his heart.

In the midst of negotiations with the Cincinnati Bengals, Allen's agent called to say the deal had collapsed. His agent tried to console him because the Atlanta Falcons and New York Jets were still interested, but Allen saw this moment as God closing the door to an NFL career.

"I told my agent that was it for me," Allen said. "That night, I made my decision to come to seminary."

Allen enrolled as a divinity student at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, just about 30 miles down the road from the Duke campus. He has spent the last three years training for his all-consuming desire to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, preparing to chase converts the way he once chased quarterbacks.

"I used to think that my gift of evangelism was something unusual but now I think it's a sign of a healthy Christian," Allen said. "I think it's a normal desire all Christians ought to have."

Although he graduates this semester, Allen has accepted the position of admissions director at the seminary. He eventually hopes to pursue a doctorate, and he continues to preach every time he is given the opportunity.

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(BP) photo available from Southeastern's communication office.

Intercessory prayer ministry
leads pastor to volunteer By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
4/28/93

NEW YORK (BP)--Scott Stearman offers one piece of advice to people with intercessory prayer ministries: Get ready to be an answer to prayer.

As pastor of First Baptist Church in Carney, Okla., Stearman habitually called the toll-free Southern Baptist Home Mission Board prayer line and read "Prayer-Gram," the HMB's prayer request list, to update the church's intercessory prayer ministry.

Last year Stearman was planning to attend Princeton University in New Jersey when he noticed a prayer request for a volunteer at Graffiti Baptist Center on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

After visiting the university and meeting a home missionary at Graffiti, Stearman decided to combine education and ministry. He now works on a master's degree Monday through Friday and volunteers in a government-owned housing project on weekends.

Stearman primarily visits people who attend one of Graffiti's outreach events, perhaps the free lunch in the park or after school program for children.

Most of the people Stearman sees live in apartment high rises where windows on the first three floors are covered with bars and outside doors are locked at all times. An estimated 90,000 people live in the housing project that is a block wide and several blocks long.

When Stearman meets residents, he says he tries to "find out where they're at in their faith walk and in their socio-economic needs." He eventually wants to see them make a decision for Christ, but he says that is only the first step. They must also deal with issues such as drug and alcohol addiction or criminal behavior.

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"It starts with hope," Stearman says. "They need to believe that life is more than eating, drinking and dying someday."

Though Stearman visits in the housing project every weekend, he admits he will always be an outsider. He is working to develop a ministry team of local residents. One woman prays for team leaders. Another accompanies Stearman on visits. A third woman works with children.

Stearman, who also graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, will finish the Princeton program in May. Again he is turning to prayer to discern where God's leadership.

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(BP) vertical photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Outline on SBCNet News Room.

Historical Commission
meeting marked by firsts

By Carol Woodfin

Baptist Press
4/28/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Historical Commission elected its first African-American officer during its annual meeting April 26 in Nashville. Commissioners elected Theodore "Ted" Wilson, an attorney from Indianapolis, Ind. vice chairman for 1993-94.

Marlene Hunt Rikard, the first woman trustee chair of a Southern Baptist Convention agency, presided over meetings. Rikard, professor of history at Samford University, was elected last year for the 1992-93 term. She has completed eight years of service as a commissioner.

Commissioners elected Slayden Yarbrough chair for 1993-94. A commissioner since 1987, he is Dickinson professor of religion at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee.

Johanna Dawson, New Mexico commissioner, and Lynn E. May Jr., the commission's executive director were re-elected secretary and treasurer, respectively.

This year's meeting was the first to be attended by a trustee from the Pennsylvania/South Jersey Baptist Convention. Emma Walker, formerly a secretary with the State of New Jersey and the United States Department of Agriculture, is from Mercersburg, Pa.

Commissioners approved a revised budget of \$583,551, down from \$647,274, due to a reduction in Cooperative Program allocations for 1993-94. The commission approved a projected 1994-95 budget of \$626,021, including a Cooperative Program allocation request of \$543,471.

Commissioners recognized at the conclusion of their service were Rikard and Fayly Cothorn, Arizona, eight years. Others cited for their service as trustees were John Dyer, Kansas-Nebraska (seven years), and Furman Hendrix, Georgia (four years).

Trustees and staff honored Charles W. Deweese, assistant executive director, and Shirley Rose, receptionist, on their 20th anniversaries with the commission.

The commission's Distinguished Service Award for Outstanding Contributions to Baptist History went to W. Morgan Patterson. Patterson, currently teaching at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, previously was dean of academic affairs at the California seminary, assistant professor of church history at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Patterson was president of Georgetown College from 1984 until his retirement in 1991. He was president of the Southern Baptist Historical Society, 1979-80; a Historical Commission trustee, 1967-74; and chairman, 1969-72. Patterson was commended as an "effective and longtime promoter of Baptist history as a teacher, preacher, writer, trustee, and administrator."

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Adrian Lamkin, director of the Partee Center for Baptist Historical Studies in Missouri, received the Davis C. Woolley Award for outstanding achievement in state Baptist history work. In addition to its ongoing work through the Partee Center at William Jewell College, the Missouri Baptist Historical Commission published a pamphlet in 1992 on Old Bethel Church, perhaps the oldest Baptist church west of the Mississippi River. The Missouri Baptist Historical Society focused its annual meeting in October on the Old Bethel church and the restoration of that historic site. The commission completed two additional pamphlets, on Milford Riggs, founder of the Baptist Home for the Aged in Missouri, and Jeremiah Vardeman, first moderator of the Missouri Baptist Convention in 1834. The Norman W. Cox Award for the best article published by the commission in 1992 went to Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville. Parham's article, "A.C. Miller: The Bible Speaks on Race," appeared in the January 1992 issue of Baptist History and Heritage.

The Southern Baptist Historical Society met jointly with the Historical Commission April 27-28, under the theme, "Baptists and the News Media." The society elected as president R. Hargus Taylor, chairman of the department of religion and philosophy at Chowan College in Murfreesboro, N.C.; vice president, Albert Wardin, professor of history at Belmont University in Nashville; and treasurer, Lynn E. May Jr.

Next year's Historical Commission and historical society meeting will be April 25-27 in Memphis, Tenn., under the theme, "The Ministries of Baptist Laypeople."

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Second senior adult convention
brings practical, spiritual helps

Baptist Press
4/28/93

ATLANTA (BP)--Packing about half of the 40,000-seat new Georgia Dome in Atlanta, senior adults received practical and inspirational helps during a three-day convention, April 26-28.

The four general sessions at the national Southern Baptist Senior Adult Convention offered the 20,000 senior adults from 31 states musical entertainment, preaching, drama and Bible study.

An exhibit area with about 36 exhibits, including a convention bookstore provided by Baptist Book Stores and Lifeway Christian Stores, also was available for senior adults at the Georgia Dome.

According to Steve Dycus, store manager, gift items led in popular products as well as books by Atlanta pastor Charles Stanley and music by Christian concert artists Cynthia Clawson and Steve Green. Stadium cushions for \$1 each, sold by the National Association of Baptist Senior Adults, proved to be one of the more popular bargains in the exhibit area.

Among the 35 other exhibitors were Southern Baptist Convention agencies; companies providing products for senior adults; retirement centers; travel agencies; entertainment, medical and church organizations.

The theme of the second-ever national convention, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board discipleship and family development division, was "Senior Adults Making a Difference."

The first senior adult convention was held in 1987 in Fort Worth.

Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, told senior adults they cannot make a difference in their churches, homes or communities until they know what it means to be "in Christ."

"Being in Christ means having a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must be our very life, not just our Savior and Lord," he said.

Stanley said the vast amount of spiritual resources Christian senior adults could offer is "awesome."

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"The awesome potential of people our age is absolutely indescribable," he said.

Meanwhile, TV personality Art Linkletter told Southern Baptist senior adults the key to a quality life is deep faith in God.

"Faith in God will make life more meaningful," said Linkletter, who is 80. "The closer you get to eternity the more you need something to believe in."

Now touring the country as a humorist and motivational speaker, Linkletter warned, "... getting old is one of the most surprising things that can happen to anybody."

However, if senior adults fight for their independence, privacy and rights and plan for their later years, retirement can be a quality time, Linkletter said.

Leading the Bible study each session, Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, preached about the only grandmother cited in the Bible. Quoting from 2 Timothy, Harbour said a woman called Lois modeled the qualities of grandparenting.

"The greatest sin today is that we have relegated to other institutions what can only be done in the home," Harbour said.

When Christian grandparents teach and live their faith, grandchildren often become Christians, he added.

Irene Endicott, a writer and speaker from Hansville, Wash., agreed that grandparents can "make a difference for Christ in their own grandchildren's lives. We can be refuges for our grandchildren who are in distress" because of divorces, remarriages, abuse and wrecked home lives, she said. "And we can do it simply by modeling the Christ we love so much."

Grandparents should "live a Christian life, not preach it," Endicott said. "We should take every opportunity to teach our grandchildren to trust the Lord.

"Let us be stable rock, a foundation for our families."

Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., brought the closing messages at the convention. His emphasis was on the church and how it proclaims "victory in Jesus."

Pollard pointed out three ways in which Jesus brings victory -- over sin, over time and over life.

"The great word," Pollard said, "is not that we're sinners, but that God did something about it."

Secondly, Pollard said, "Victory and happiness live in the same home, not across the street from each other," stressing that joy is one of the chief characteristics of the Christian life.

On his third point, the pastor said, "When you link your life with Christ by faith, you're never going to die."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers from Atlanta on Wednesday.

Contributing to this story were Jim Burton, Gomer Lesch, Charles Willis and Terri Lackey.

HOUSE MAIL



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